

FOCUS ON STRATEGIC MILITARY GUIDANCE Dokalam falls under the Eastern Command; Indian Army team will be on a goodwill visit to China next week; both sides likely discuss issues related to Beijing hotline

Eastern Army Cdr Heads for China, Def Min to Visit Delhi

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New Delhi: India and China will be engaged in a series of military-related confidence building measures (CBMs) over the next two weeks, including visit by Chinese defence minister to Delhi in the backdrop of the Wuhan Summit that gave strategic guidance to the two militaries.

A four-member Indian Army delegation headed by Eastern Army Commander Lt Gen Abhay Krishna will be going on a "goodwill visit" to China from August 13 to 19. Incidentally, Dokalam falls under the Eastern Command.

It will be the first such visit after the 2017 Dokalam (standoff) which is under India's eastern army command. The delegation will be visiting four cities in China- Beijing, Shanghai, Chengdu and Lhasa.

ET has learnt that during Chinese defence minister Wei Fenghe's visit, both sides will attempt to resolve differences in setting up of a hotline between the armies of the two countries. The initiative hit a roadblock over differences between the two sides on issues relating to protocol and technical aspect of the hotline. This is the first high-level visit from China since Wuhan Summit and subsequent Modi-Xi meetings aimed at stabilising ties in backdrop of Dokalam episode.

The Indian Army has been maintaining that the hotline should be between its Director General of Military Operations (DGMO) and his equivalent official in People's Liberation Army (PLA), while Beijing proposed that deputy commander of its Chengdu-based Western Theatre Command would engage with the Indian DGMO, persons familiar with the process indicated.

Hanging in Balance

INDIAN ARMY SAYS hotline should be set up for Director General of Military Operations of both the nations



PLA seems to have conveyed that it does not have any DGMO in its headquarter

There are also certain issues related to translators for Mandarin and English

Wei's will be the first high-level visit from China since Wuhan Summit

Hotline between India and China was first mooted in 2013

It is learnt that Chinese PLA has also conveyed to Indian Army that they do not have any DGMO in its headquarters and that it was favouring engaging the Western Theatre Command in charge of the Sino-India border.

However, the Indian side feels that the protocol must be maintained and equating the Indian Army headquarters to PLA's Western Theatre Command in Chengdu was not proper. There were also certain issues relating to engaging translators for Mandarin and English by the two sides.

LIKELY DISCUSSION

 Wei & Nirmala may discuss various issues such as ways to boost coordination between militaries along border

India and Pakistan have a hotline between their DGMOs. The hotline between India and China was first mooted by the two countries in 2013. A slew of other issues like ways to improve coordination between the two militaries along the border will also figure in talks Wei will have with his counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman.

Earlier an eight-member Chinese military delegation led by Lt Gen Liu Xiaowu, Deputy Commander of Western Theatre Command, visited India in June as a follow-up to the Wuhan summit between Modi and Xi. The delegation also went to Kolkata, where the headquarters of the Eastern Army Command is located.

While South Korean Defence Minister is currently visiting India, Japanese Defence Minister will be here ahead of his Chinese counterpart. With Japan India is exploring defence purchases and technology transfer based on similar geo-political approaches. India and Japan are seeking to expand joint defence exercises besides partnership in the seas to monitor underwater activities.